Pamba Action Plan

*283. PROF. P.J. KURIAN: Will the Minister of ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS be pleased to state:

(a) whether the Government have approved the Pampa Action Plan to clean and protect the Pamba River in the State of Kerala;

(b) if so, the details thereof;

(c) the present status of the action plan; and

(d) in how much time the plan is expected to be implemented fully?

THE MINISTER OF ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS (SHRI A. RAJA): (a) to (d) A Statement is laid on the Table of the House.

Statement

Question No. 283 to be raised by Prof. P.J. Kurian.

(a) and (b) The first phase of the project for abatement of pollution of River Pamba at Sabrimala and Pamba in Kerala has been approved for an amount of Rs. 18.45 crore under National River Conservation Plan (NRCP) with Central share in the project cost of Rs. 12.92 crore and the State Govt.'s share of Rs. 5.53 crore.

(c) and (d) Under the above project, the first installment amounting to Rs. 75 lakhs under the Central share has already been released. As the area where works are proposed to be taken up falls under the Periyar Tiger Reserve, specific clearance from the Apex Court is required by the user agency (Travancore Devaswom Board) for diversion of forest land for undertaking these works, for which necessary recommendation has already been made by the Standing Committee of National Board of Wildlife (NBWL).

As regards the remaining phases of the Pamba Action Plan, the detailed project reports are to be submitted by the State Government as per the Master Plan, the preparation of which has been entrusted to a professional agency by the State Government.

PROF. P.J. KURIAN: Sir, this question is very important. The river Pamba is considered to be a holy river in the State of Kerala as the Ganga river.

Sabrimala, where the shrine of Lord Ayyappa is located, is at the bank of the Pamba river. Millions of pilgrims every year visit Sabrimala not only from Kerala but also from throughout the country; from Maharashtra, from Tamil Nadu, from Andhra Pradesh, and from Karnataka. From all the States, millions of pilgrims come there. It is as important as Tirupati in Andhra Pradesh. All the pilgrims, who come there, take a holy bath in the Pamba river. But what is the condition of that river? It is most polluted. Because of open defecation, raw sewage running directly into the river, domestic waste...(*Interruptions*)...

MR. CHAIRMAN: What do you want from the Minister?

PROF. P.J. KURIAN: Pardon, Sir.

MR. CHAIRMAN: What do you want from the Government?

PROF. P.J. KURIAN: Sir, I want to help the Minister by explaining it. Now, I am coming to the question. As early as 2002, the then Chief Minister of Kerala, Shri A.K. Antony, submitted an Expert Committee's Report to the Central Government in which it was said that the project of cleaning the river has to be completed in three years. And the first phase....

Sir, I want your kind indulgence. That is why, I am waiting.

MR. CHAIRMAN: I was talking to him about your subject.

PROF. P.J. KURIAN: Sir, according to the project submitted by the then Chief Minister of Kerala, the first phase was to cost Rs. 169 crores, in 2002. But, Sir, look at the reply. Kindly, look at the reply. It is 2005, still the project is not started. Who is responsible for this delay? And then....(*Interruptions*)...

MR. CHAIRMAN: Prof. Kurian, please, give some time to the hon. Minister to reply to your question.

PROF. P.J. KURIAN: Yes, Sir. The Minister has said that Rs. 18 crores is sanctioned. But the reply says that only Rs.75 lakhs have been released, after three years. Therefore, in view of the importance of this project, I would like to know from the hon. Minister whether he will give an assurance as to when the project will be started; as to when the project will be completed; and whether the Central Government will release the entire amount requested by the State Government.

SHRI A. RAJA: Sir, the Government is aware of the significance attached to this pilgrim place, namely, the Pamba river. Of course, the estimated cost worked out to clean the river is approximately Rs.319 crores. But due to non-availability of funds, it has been put into three phases.

In the first phase, we got the detailed project report from the State Government, for which we sanctioned Rs. 18.45 crores.

For phase two and phase three, we are expecting the detailed project report from the State Government. Notwithstanding the efforts being made by the Central Government, another external funding system, that is, loan, for which papers have been mooted to get a loan from the Japan bank of International Cooperation, is in the process. Papers have been submitted to the Department of Economic Affairs. In turn, the Department of Economic Affairs has recommended the case, and it has been sent to the Japan Bank. We are facilitating the loan amount. We are optimistic to get it.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Shri A. Vijayaraghavan.

PROF. P.J. KURIAN: Sir, my second supplementary.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Sorry, Actually, the first supplementary covers everything.

PROF. P.J. KURIAN: Sir, actually the hon. Minister has not properly replied to my question. In the first phase, the amount asked for the project was Rs. 169 crores, whereas what is sanctioned is Rs. 18 crores. What the Government has released is only Rs.75 lakhs. This is a callous approach. He should reply to that. Sir, my second supplementary is this. I would like the whole House to take note of this point that Sabrimala is the only temple in the country where the pilgrims go and worship in a mosque and a temple. This is especially important. This has to be noted. Therefore, Sabrimala it should be declared as a temple of national importance. I would like to ask that in view of the special importance of this temple and this project, will the Central Government agree to bear the entire cost of the project...(*Interruptions*)...

MR. CHAIRMAN: Let him say something.

PROF. P.J. KURIAN: .....because, today, they want to share the

cost between the State and the Centre. I want the Minister to, at least, consider that the cost of whole project be totally borne by the Central Government.

SHRI A. RAJA: Sir, the funding system cannot be changed by me. If at all it has to be changed, it has to be changed by the Cabinet decision. So far as the first phase is concerned, we sanctioned Rs. 18.45 crores and we have released Rs.75 lakhs. Even it is not spent so far. The problem is, in order to sanction the project, we must get forest clearance and clearance from the National Board on Wildlife ...(*Interruptions*)... After a long time, a few months back, I chaired the Standing Committee meeting and I removed all the hurdles. It was recommended to the Prime Minister and the Prime Minister asked the Chairman, National Wildlife Board that he has to clear it. After that, it has gone to the Supreme Court. The Supreme Court guidelines are there. It has been placed before the Supreme Court. We are waiting for the order from the Supreme Court. As soon as the hurdles are removed by the Supreme Court, the entire project will be taken up.

SHRI A. VIJAYARAGHVAN: Sir, it is a special project since nearly about two crore pilgrims are coming. They are going back with skin diseases. That is the problem. You must be careful about the pilgrims. They are coming here and after a dip, they are going back with skin diseases. The coliform content is 15,000 per 100 m.l.t. water. This is the seriousness. Sir, the problem is that the Central Government as well as the State Government is not serious about this problem. Whatever reply is given here, we are awaiting the funds from Japanese people and the pilgrims are coming. You must be very careful because this is a very important issue related to the pilgrims. Naturally, something positive should be done. That is the thing. But, unfortunately, the reply of the Minister is not at all satisfactory. Here, there are 17 projects pending with the Government; and as far as the first phase is concerned, you must release, at least, Rs.18 crores. What is the problem in releasing these Rs. 18 crores and when are you going to release it? Next year also, the pilgrims will come. So, this has to be solved. That answer should be given by the Minister as to what is the lacuna, what is the problem. Will you consult the State Government to resolve the issue? Sir, I would like to hear from the Minister a positive reply to resolve this

issue. Are you going to consult and resolve this problem? Thank you, Sir.

SHRI A. RAJA: Sir, so far as the approved cost is concerned, it is Rs. 18.45 crores. Releasing the amount is not at all a problem....(*Interruptions*)... How can we release the amount without utilization? There must be utilization certificates periodically. The project has not taken off. The problem is forest clearance and Wildlife Board clearance. Sir. there is a tiger reserve, Periyar Tiger Reserve. The House is well aware that there is pressure outside also with regard to the protection of wildlife. When there is a notified tiger reserve, in the name of national park and sanctuary, the law cannot be diluted, unless and until it has its own due process. That is why I am submitting before the House, the Standing Committee exclusively set up....(*Interruptions*)...

SHRI A. VIJAYA RAGHVAN: You discuss it with the State Government.

SHRI A. RAJA: The problem is not with the State Government. The State Goverment submitted papers for forest and environment clearance. It has been submitted before the Committee. As the Chairman of the Standing Committee, the Chief Minister of Kerala met me twice. Accordingly, I cleared the papers in the Standing Committee. It went to the Supreme Court. The Supreme Court is taking cognizance of almost all matters, and it is subject to the clearance by the Supreme Court. It is being awaited. That's all.

SHRI A. VIJAYARAGHVAN: At least tell us how much time would it take.

SHRI A. RAJA: I cannot give any time-frame on behalf of the Supreme Court....(*Interruptions*)... I don't have the judicial power....(*Interruptions*)...

SHRI A.K. ANTONY: Sir, I can see a number of Lord Ayyappa devotees on this side and on that side also. Sir, I can see a number of devotees on this side as well as on that side of the House. ....(*Interruptions*)...

AN HON'BLE MEMBER: Not on that side.

SHRI A.K. ANTONY: On that side also. ....(*Interruptions*)...

SHRI A. VIJAYARAGHVAN: But the devotees are voting for us. ....(*Interruptions*)...

MR. CHAIRMAN: I think you are very much interested in it.

SHRI A.K. ANTONY: Sir, every year, various Parliamentary Committees are coming to this place, and after their visit, everybody has been assuring that this year onwards, the Government of India will take it seriously. Ultimately,after their persuasion in the year 2002, the Government has agreed to implement the first phase of the project costing Rs.18 crores. But actually, the Government of Kerala has submitted a project costing Rs. 360 crores. So, unless the whole project is finally cleared, it is difficult to complete it in a piecemeal manner. The Minister has just now said that he has given clearance for Rs. 75 lakhs. There is no use of giving clearance for Rs. 75 lakhs unless the Government gives a clearance for the entire project, and unless the Government releases substantial amount, we will not be able to start the project. My request is, as Prof. P.J. Kurian said, it is a national pilgrimage centre. Every year, crores of pilgrims are coming to that place. Their number is increasing. They are not only from Kerala, but also from Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Delhi, Maharashtra. All over India, pilgrims are coming. It is a national pilgrimage centre, and the whole amount should be cleared by the Government of India. If a Cabinet sanction is needed, that can be had. Sir, I request you also to recommend our case to the Government so that we can start the project.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Then leave it to me.

SHRI A.K. ANTONY: I request the Chairman also to pay a visit to Sabrimala, and have *darshan* of Lord Ayyappa. (*Interruptions*).

SHRI V. NARAYANASAMY: Sir, I would like to add one point. The Minister can answer my question also. Sir, the hon. Minister wanted to wriggle out of this issue by giving a technical answer because, he is not touching the real issue. The real issue is, fund is required for the project. For that, the Minister has said that they have written to the Japan Bank and all that. The hon. Minister, in the capacity of a Chairman, has cleared it because the Public Accounts Committee had visited the place. Several action taken reports have been submitted but all have been thrown to the winds. Let the hon. Minister give a categorical assurance in this House that the Ministry of Environment and Forests will make provision for the funding of the project. Let him say that. (*Interruptions*).

SHRI A. RAJA: Sir, within the limited resources available with me, subject to the prescribed procedure which is being followed by the National River Conservation Programme, we are giving money to Kerala and other States. The existing constraint permits me to give only Rs. 18 crores for the first phase for which the DPR has been submitted to the Government of India. In respect of the second and third phases, the State Government is yet to file the DPRs. Without DPRs, how can I give the full money? If at all the DPRs are filed, I can persuade the Cabinet, whether it is 100 per cent or 50 per cent, and we can enhance it. My submission is, with Rs. 18 crores, the project is not able to take off because of the Supreme Court congnizance. As soon as permission is obtained from the Supreme Court, the first phase will be taken care of. Meanwhile, I can say before the House that for Rs. 600 crores, we will pursue the matter with the JBC of Japan.

DR. BIMAL JALAN: Sir, this question also relates to the next question of Mr. Janardhana Poojary. Sir, is it true that the Government of India is planning to issue a new Environment Policy which has just been approved by the Cabinet? If so, will the Minister assure the House that after the passage of this new Environment Policy, we can tackle the kind of problems which are being discussed here and which are discussed in the next question sooner than is the case now? If that is not the possibility, what is the point of issuing yet another policy document if the implementation of it cannot be done quickly, more effectively, without going to the Supreme Court and without hurdles? Can the hon. Minister enlighten us on this point, the reason for issuing the New Policy?

SHRI A. RAJA: Sir, the purpose behind the Environment Policy, which is going to be given to this country, is that India is a signatory to various international conventions and international protocols. The subject of environment is a concurrent subject, as per the Constitution. When the Government of India puts its hand to the protocol with a promise that within five years or six years we will reduce the emissions, whatever be the stipulations that are going to be accepted by the Government of India, we must have our own domestic policy. Unless we compel the State Pollution Control Boards to reach the norms, I can't give a promise to the international fora. It is not for river conservation alone. The Environment Policy is going to be a holistic approach towards all types

of pollutions. It will address, not only domestically but also internationally, how the pollution can be reduced in terms of the present scenario throughout the world.

Major Rivers choked with industrial effluents

*284. SHRI JANARDHANA POOJARY: Will the Minister of ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS be pleased to state:

(a) whether a number of major rivers and their tributaries are choking with industrial effluents and other pollutants;

(b) if so, what are the details in this regard and the programmes initiated by Government to clean the rivers indicating the amount spent thereon during the last three years;

(c) whether it is a fact that heavy discharge of sewage water in the Yamuna River is creating havoc with the aquatic life in the river and defeating the River Conservation Plan; and

(d) if so, the details thereof and the corrective steps taken in this regard?

THE MINISTER OF ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS (SHRI A. RAJA): (a) to (d) A Statement is laid on the Table of the House.

Statement

(a) to (d) 71 river stretches are polluted *inter-alia* due to discharge of domestic and industrial effluents. Steps taken by the Government with regard to pollution from industrial and other sources include notifying industry specific effluent standards, promoting setting up of common effluent treatment plants and environmental surveillance by the Central Pollution Control Board, State Pollution Control Boards and Pollution Control Committees, besides improving the quality of water in major rivers through the National River Conservation Plan (NRCP). Under the NRCP, pollution abatement works are undertaken including diversion and interception of sewage, installation of sewerage treatment plants, etc. A seweage treatment capacity of 865 mld under this programme launched in 1985 under Ganga Action Plan (Phase-I) has been created and subsequent to that, another 1421 mld capacity will the end of the